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Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, relative to an appropriation for subsisting the Red Cloud and Whetstone Indian agencies

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RED CLOUD AND WHETSTONE INDIAN AGENCIES.

LETTER

FROM THE

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

RELATIVE TO

An appropriation for subsisting the Red Cloud and Whetstone Indian agencies.

MARCH 19, 1874.—Referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be printed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, D. C., March 17, 1874.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith copy of a letter from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated the 16th instant, in relation to supplies for the Red Cloud and Whetstone Indian agencies.

It will be observed by a careful perusal of the Commissioner's letter that the supplies of beef for these agencies will be exhausted on the 1st of April. It will also be observed that this is owing to the large increase in the number of Indians fed at these agencies, by reason of accessions from various northern bands of Sioux Indians during the past year, who had not theretofore gone to the agencies for the receipt of provisions. It will be seen, also, that the contractors for the supply of beef at these agencies decline to furnish any more beef at the price fixed in the present contract after the herds on hand for the purpose have been exhausted. I beg to state, in this connection, what is a well-known fact, that the Sioux Indians are numerous, powerful, and warlike; and that heretofore, with the exception of the Minneconjous, Sans Arcs, and Unkpapas, they have been on friendly relations with the Government, and have daily shown an increased disposition to go upon reservations and remain permanently at peace. This disposition has been increased and continued by the expectation that the Government would furnish them supplies and subsistence during the time that they were trying to learn the arts of peace and self-support. A failure on the part of the Government to comply with the expectations which the Indians have justly formed on this subject will almost certainly produce a very general feeling of hostility among those who have before been friendly; and it is feared by the Indian Office and this Department that, should the Government fail to furnish the supplies needed, the friendly Indians will leave their reservations, abandon the agencies, and unite with the wild

and warlike tribes heretofore named, who have not hitherto shown a disposition to go on reservations.

I deem it, therefore, of the utmost importance, economically as well as morally, that the recommendation of the Commissioner for an appropriation to continue feeding these Indians be complied with at the earliest possible moment. It is greatly to be feared, and almost certainly to be anticipated, that a failure to make this appropriation will result in producing the general unfriendly feelings, to which I have alluded, with all the Sioux; and it is more than probable that this would end in a general war, far more expensive than the small amount asked for for the purpose of preserving peace. A single regiment of soldiers in one month would expend the \$200,000 required, and produce probably no good result.

I deem it my duty, therefore, to invite the attention of Congress in the most earnest manner to this subject, and to request in the most urgent terms suitable that the appropriations requested by the Commissioner be immediately made.

I beg that this communication may be referred to the Committee on Appropriations at once; and if any further explanation, personal or otherwise, is desired from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs or from the Department, it shall be furnished as soon as requested.

I transmit a copy of this letter to the Committee on Indian Affairs in the Senate, with the request that it be laid before the Appropriation Committee of that body at the earliest practicable moment.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

C. DELANO,
Secretary.

HON. JAMES G. BLAINE,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, D. C., March 16, 1874.

SIR: I have the honor to present to the Department the following statement in relation to supplies for the Red Cloud and Whetstone Indian agencies:

On the 18th ultimo the Department was informed by this Office that the contract for supplying beef at said agencies would expire on the 15th of March instant, by the delivery of all the cattle called for under it, including the increase of 25 per cent. therein provided for.

The estimates for beef for these agencies upon which the contract was made were based upon information that the number of Indians to be fed was about ten thousand, or five thousand at each agency.

This number was, however, largely increased by accessions from northern tribes and bands; and the issue of beef was, by necessity, correspondingly increased, and the quantity issued was further enlarged by the excessive demands of the Indians, which the agents were powerless to resist; also by the refusal of the Indians to permit the agents to make the issues of rations upon an actual count of their lodges, according to instructions from this Office.

The temper of the Indians was such as rendered it important for the Government to provide for their actual necessities; and although the deficiency of beef was partly occasioned by their refusal to comply with the regulations adopted for feeding them, it was feared that if the sup-

pplies should become exhausted they would abandon the agencies and commit depredations to procure subsistence.

The Department, at the request of this Office, represented the condition of affairs to the Board of Indian Commissioners, in session in this city, on the 19th ultimo, and, in view of the emergency, requested early consideration and their suggestions in the premises. On the 21st ultimo the board forwarded a copy of their resolution upon the subject, "that whatever supplies are necessary to feed the Indians should be furnished for the present."

The contractor has consented to continue the delivery of beef at his contract-price, viz, \$2.72½ per 100 pounds gross weight, until his herd of cattle is exhausted, which will probably be about the 1st of April proximo, after which date he advises the Department that cattle cannot be purchased and delivered at the same price.

There are no more funds on hand than will be required to meet payments under existing contracts for beef to be delivered at the several agencies on the Upper Missouri River; and the question is respectfully submitted, what course shall be pursued, or what measures adopted, to purchase the necessary quantity of beef for issue to the Indians of the Red Cloud and Whetstone agencies up to the 1st July next.

The attention of Congress should be earnestly invited to the importance that this subject receive early and adequate consideration.

A failure, or even delay to provide subsistence for the Indians, will, at the present juncture, tend to disturb, if not destroy the friendly relations with the Sioux who have remained at said agencies, and resisted the appeal of the hostile portion of the nation to join them in a war against the whites; jeopardize the peace of the frontier; endanger the lives of the settlers; and hazard the expenditure of millions of treasure.

It is estimated that there will be 15,000 Indians at the two agencies named that will have to be subsisted to the 1st of July next, and that it will take at least fifteen cents a day to feed them. On this basis it will require an appropriation of \$202,500, which I respectfully recommend that Congress be asked to make for the purpose named.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

EDWD. P. SMITH,
Commissioner.

The Hon. SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.